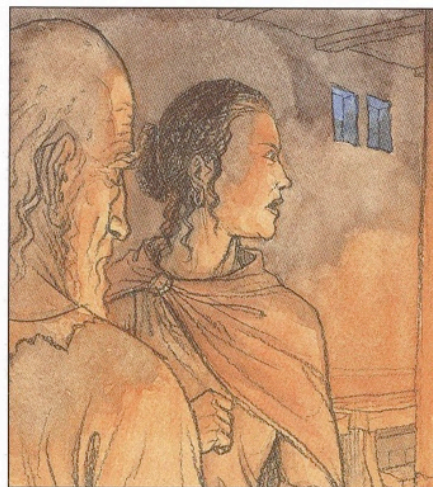
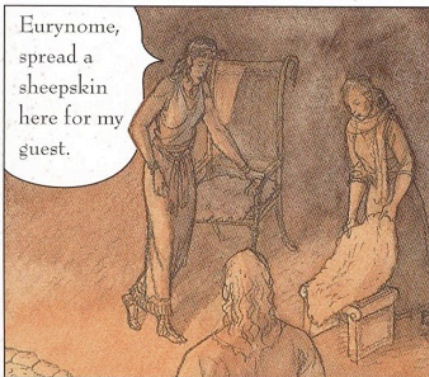


Are you still here? Creepy old man, stop watching the maids; go outside and cuddle your dinner!

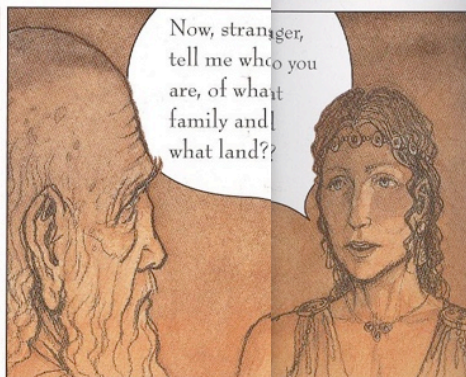


Melantho! Are you maid, insulting my guest? You knew I was waiting to speak to him. Get out!

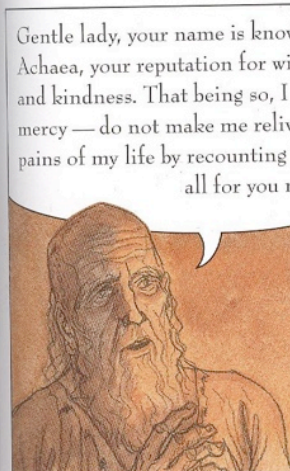
Go see Eurymachus; I know he is your lover.



Eurynome, spread a sheepskin here for my guest.



Now, stranger, tell me who you are, of what family and what land??

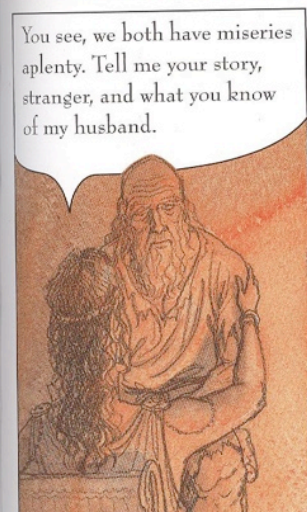


Gentle lady, your name is known throughout Achaea, your reputation for wisdom, beauty, and kindness. That being so, I appeal to your mercy — do not make me relive the pains of my life by recounting them all for you now.

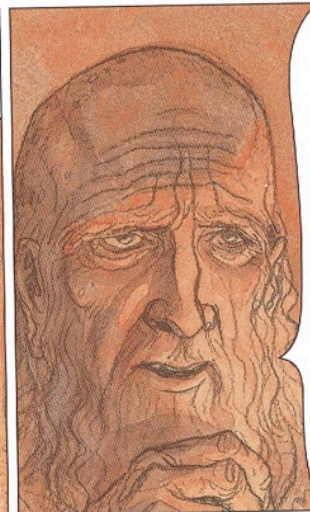


You speak well, but I know that my beauty has faded, and I am famous now only for my suffering.

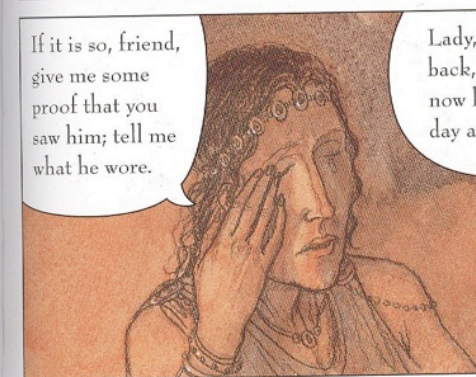
As for my wisdom, I thought to trick my unwanted suitors by delaying them while I wove a shroud for Laertes. All day I'd weave, but at night I'd pick out the work by candlelight. The trick worked for three years, but then my maids betrayed me. Now I fear I'll be forced to marry, though it is against my will.



You see, we both have miseries aplenty. Tell me your story, stranger, and what you know of my husband.



Very well, gentle lady. I pray it may suffice to tell you that I am from the broad land of Crete, where I was once a prosperous and fortunate man, until that cursed expedition to Troy. It was then I first met Odysseus, for he came to Crete to raise a fleet of ships for Agamemnon. I hosted him for nine days, while sea winds blustered and I gathered my crews together to join the Achaean army.



If it is so, friend, give me some proof that you saw him; tell me what he wore.



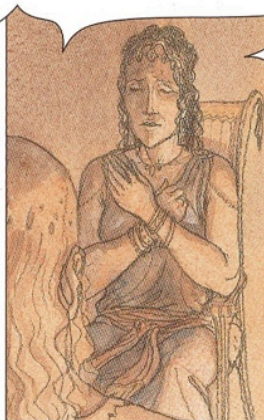
Lady, let me think back, for twenty years now lie between that day and this. . .



He had a purple cloak, lined with fleece, double thick. There was a brooch upon it, wondrous workmanship — a hound pinning a fawn, all in gold. And a fine, close-fitting tunic, marvelously soft.

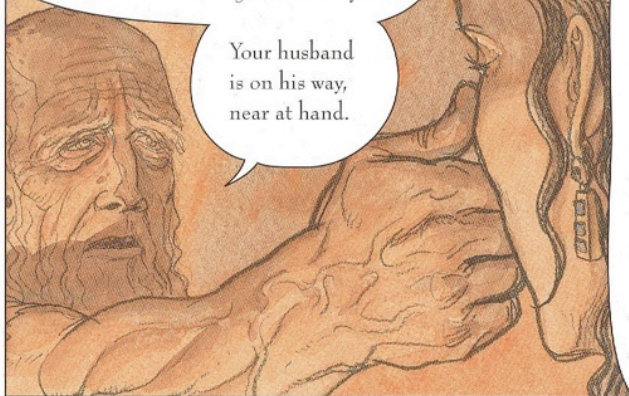


But then, I don't know if he brought these things from Ithaca or if some lord gave them to him as a guest gift.



Now you have won my thanks. I put that tunic and cloak on his shoulders myself and fastened it with that pin.

But lady, you do not need to stain your cheeks any longer with tears. I have something else to tell you.



Your husband is on his way, near at hand.

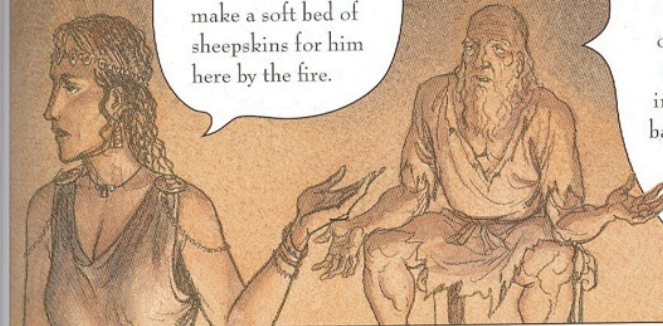
I heard this from the king of the Thesprotians, who had sent him on his way in a good ship. The man had been lost at sea for years, because his crew devoured the cattle of Helios, and so Zeus destroyed his ship and stranded him. But he escaped and made his way back here, gathering treasure as he came. I got here first only because Odysseus had come to consult the oracle.

If only what you say could prove true, you would know my gratitude and any man would count you blessed. But it will never be. We have no master here to furnish a ship and send you on your way with rich gifts, no man like Odysseus.



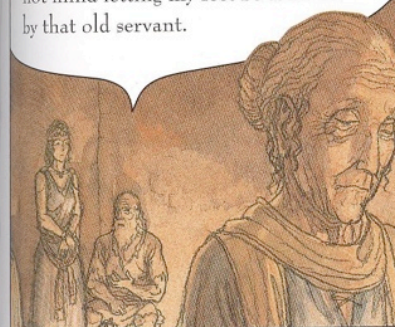
O did I dream him?

Come, maids! Bathe this man and make a soft bed of sheepskins for him here by the fire.



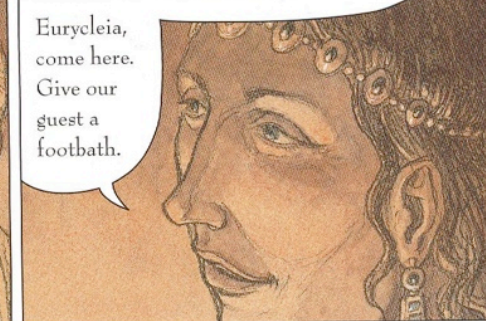
Great queen, no bed for me. I've not had one since the day I sailed off and saw the mountains of Crete shrinking behind me. And no bathing either, not even a footbath — none of these maids should touch my feet.

Unless, perhaps, there is one as old and withered as myself, who has lived through suffering as I have. I would not mind letting my feet be touched by that old servant.

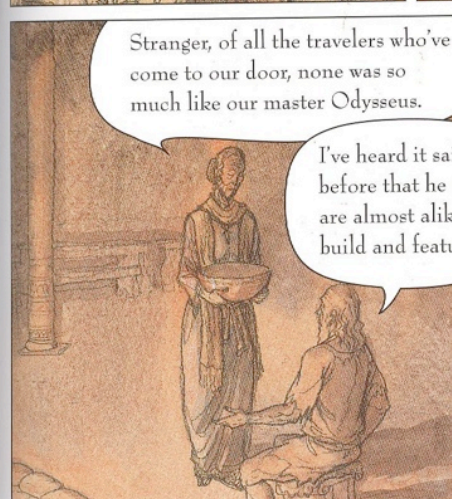


Never before did a man so humble and well spoken come to beg at my house. I have just such an old maidservant — she nursed my husband when he was a baby.

Eurycleia, come here. Give our guest a footbath.



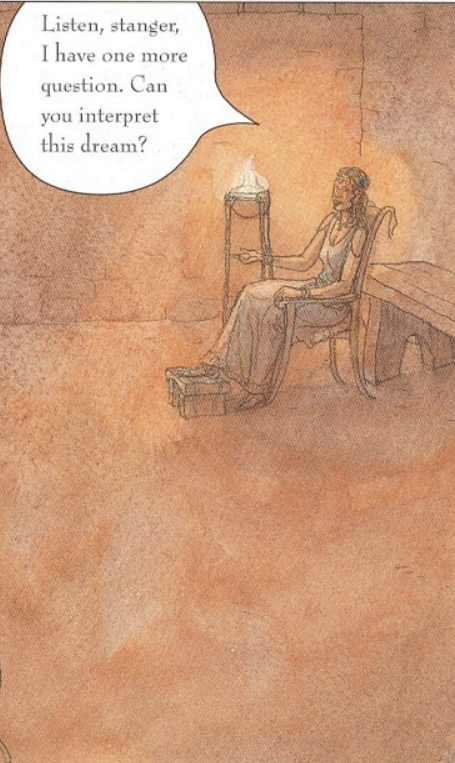
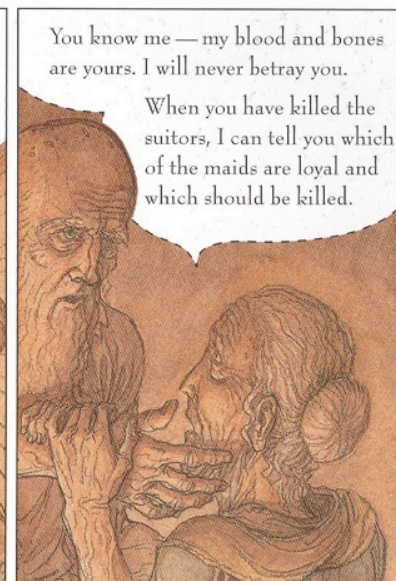
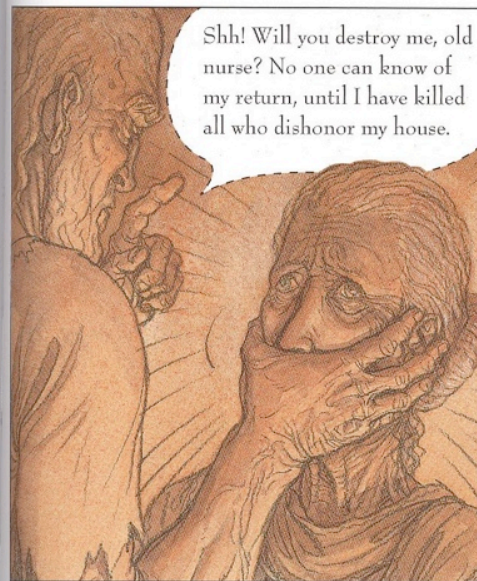
Stranger, of all the travelers who've come to our door, none was so much like our master Odysseus.



I've heard it said before that he and I are almost alike in build and feature.









From a lake, twenty fat geese come to feed beside my house. But then a great mountain eagle swoops down and breaks their necks, every one. He flies away, and I weep over the slaughter. But then he returns and perches on the roofbeam. He speaks, and says "Be glad. Those geese were your suitors, and I am your husband, returned to bring death to them all."



Lady, how can you read this dream any other way? Odysseus himself told you what it means.

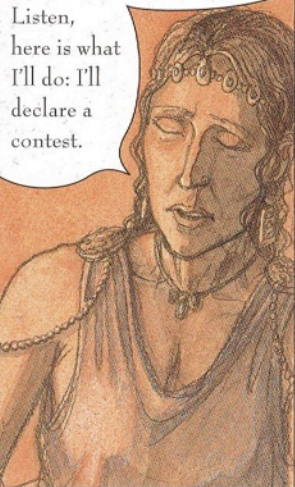
Ah, but not all dreams are true. There are two gates by which a dream may enter: one of shining ivory, one of plain horn. The dreams from the ivory gate are glimmering illusions that signify nothing. But those from the horn gate can come true — if only we know which is which!

No, it's a false hope that this dream comes from honest horn. The day I dread is upon me; I must leave Odysseus's house with a new husband.

Listen, here is what I'll do: I'll declare a contest.

We have twelve axheads in the storeroom. My husband used to line them up, all twelve, at intervals like a ship's ribbing. Then he'd take his great bow, stand back, and whip an arrow through all twelve.

Tomorrow I'll pose this challenge to the suitors and marry the one who succeeds in stringing the bow and putting an arrow through the axheads — whoever he may be.



Still awake? What troubles you?

Another man would put his trust in some mortal, but not you; no, even with a god as your guardian, still you mistrust everything.

The odds are strong against us. But more than that — after the suitors are killed, what then? Their kin will come for revenge too.



Let me make it plain, then: even if fifty such bands of men crowded around you, screaming for your blood, you would emerge victorious.

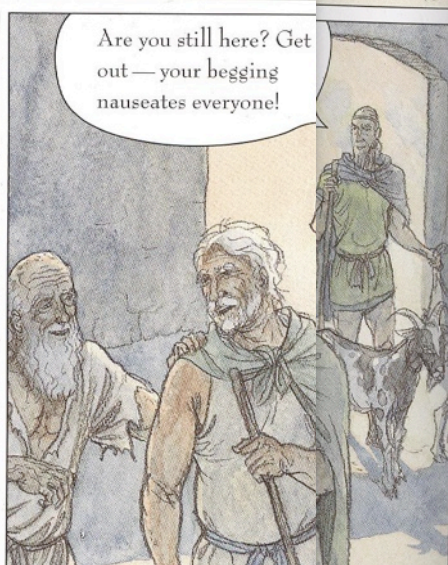
Now, rest.







Good morning, friend.

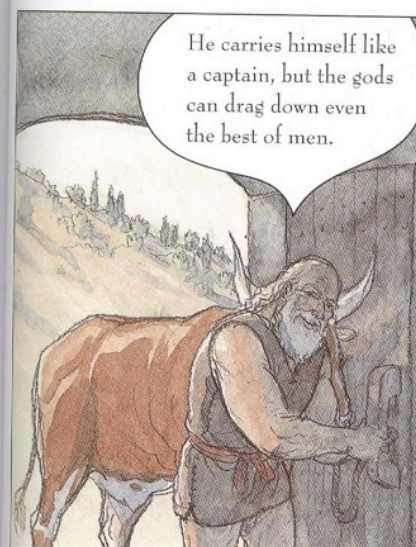


Are you still here? Get out — your begging nauseates everyone!

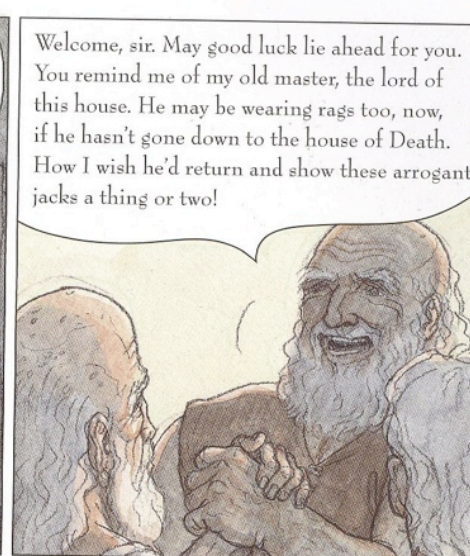


Who's this, Eumaeus? An Achaean, down on his luck?

Philoetius!

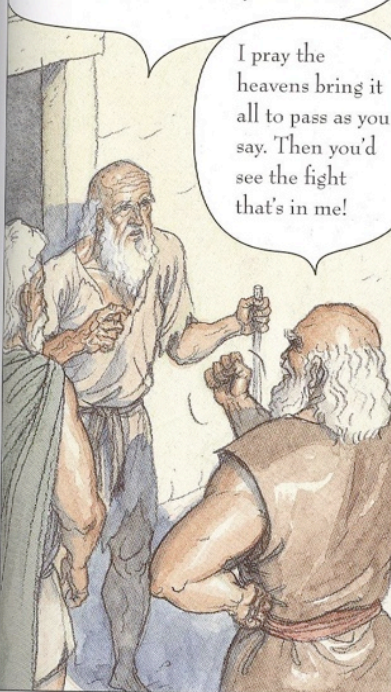


He carries himself like a captain, but the gods can drag down even the best of men.



Welcome, sir. May good luck lie ahead for you. You remind me of my old master, the lord of this house. He may be wearing rags too, now, if he hasn't gone down to the house of Death. How I wish he'd return and show these arrogant jacks a thing or two!

Sir, you seem to be no fool, no coward either. So I'll tell you truly: I swear by Zeus above, Oysseus will return — and you'll be here to see it, if you care to.



I pray the heavens bring it all to pass as you say. Then you'd see the fight that's in me!

